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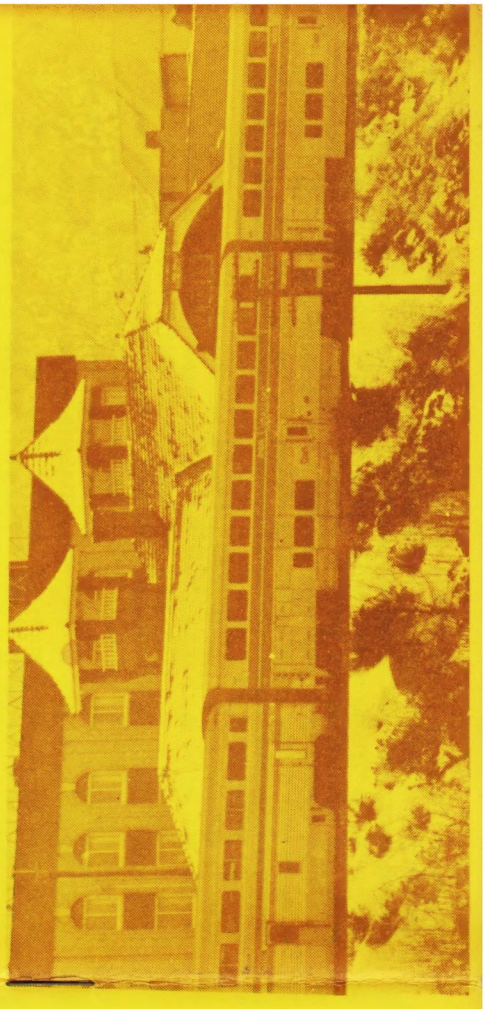
RAIL TRAVEL NEWS

Return of the CZ



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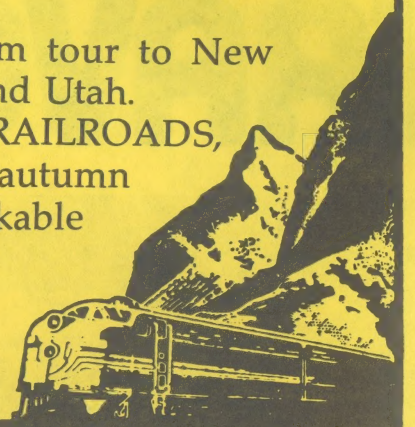

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LETTERS

Concerning Caltrain service in Southern California, if the manner in which the "new" Caltrans handled itself in the PUC hearing here is any indication, non-highway projects are in for a tough fight.

Caltrans maneuvering and lip service to Caltrain was the low point of the hearing. The service is dead. Caltrans was not willing to provide funds for platform maintenance. Southern Pacific plans to remove them unless someone comes thru and commits funds to their maintenance and protection. With the platforms gone, neither Amtrak nor Caltrain will ever stop in outlying communities north of Glendale.

The only receptive quarter was the PUC, and they were none too happy with all the lip service.

Southern California's new Transportation Commission, created by the increase (½-cent) in local sales taxes, indicated they felt Caltrain was a program with low priority and would be near the bottom of their list of programs.

Gov. Deukmejian's common sense is uprooting Caltrans support of balanced transportation and pushing California back into the STONE AGE.

Wade C. Eagleton
Van Nuys, California

(continued on page 23)

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THE COVER STORY

Regular RTN readers will already know that "Return of the CZ" refers to the Amtrak switch of the SAN FRANCISCO ZEPHYR to the RIO GRANDE ZEPHYR route between Ogden and Denver, and to the fact that Amtrak has decided to rename the SFZ the CALIFORNIA ZEPHYR when the change occurs, at the Apr 24 timetable change.

Our cover shows a travel brochure drawing of the former CALIFORNIA ZEPHYR in the Colorado Rockies and a photo of what will take the domeliner's place on Apr 25--Amtrak's Superliner "CALIFORNIA ZEPHYR". In this case the train shown is actually the test run of Feb 8, with the Superliner substitute for the RIO GRANDE ZEPHYR seen eastbound at Glenwood Springs, Colorado, in front of the picturesque station there. The larger building behind the station is the Denver Hotel. Photo by Paul Rayton.

The re-routed Amtrak train will not follow exactly the route of the pre-Amtrak CALIFORNIA ZEPHYR, but it will follow the route that the incorporators of Amtrak intended when the first Amtrak timetable was drawn up in 1971, before the Rio Grande opted out of the Amtrak system.

Now there are persistent rumors making the rounds to the effect that Amtrak plans to convert enough dome coaches to HEP to provide enough equipment for one dome liner on a Western route, instead of Superliners. At first the rumor was that the SOUTHWEST LIMITED would become this domeliner. Now the rumor is that the SAN FRANCISCO ZEPHYR will be converted to domes, and if this proves true it would seem to be an appropriate move and would result in a CALIFORNIA ZEPHYR that is even more authentic. The rumor goes on to point out that a major reason for so re-equipping one Western train is to provide enough spare Superliner cars to make the SUNSET LIMITED into a daily train, perhaps in time for the 1984 World's Fair at New Orleans. It is also believed that Amtrak plans to use domes on the forthcoming Auto-Ferry train. Apparently Amtrak owns enough dome coaches that both the Auto-Ferry and one Western train could be so equipped, in addition to the seven now being worked on at Beech Grove (one already in service on the CAPITOL LIMITED). Not counting three domes that Amtrak will obtain from the Rio Grande, there are about 25 available for conversion in addition to the seven already being converted.

JOBS BILL IS PASSED WITH AMTRAK CAPITAL FUNDS

The highly-debated Jobs Bill was passed by Congress, and President Reagan signed it into law on Mar 25. The original House and Senate versions had given Amtrak $110 million and $130 million respectively in the bill, and in the final version Amtrak is getting $80 million for labor-intensive capital projects. The bill allows Amtrak to spend the money anywhere in the system, but NARP said that "realistically" much of the money will be applied to NE Corridor projects. There are already projects on the drawing board there in areas of critically high unemployment that could be activated quickly. The funds are not earmarked for specific projects, but a report accompanying the bill indicates that priority should be given to spending $10 million on restoring passenger rail service to Cape Cod, and also to funding two station projects in Michigan--East Lansing and Jackson--at a cost of $1 each. Money for mass transit projects was also in the bill, but we do not have details on that aspect at this time.

In other Congressional news, a House budget resolution passed about a week before the Jobs Bill signing makes it appear that Amtrak may get more than $170 million for Fiscal 1984. The resolution freezes funding at Fiscal 1983 levels for Amtrak and four other transportation categories. But it requires that the 403-B program continue, and this may lead to committees raising the sum above $170 million for Amtrak by taking amounts out of the other categories.

RAIL CANADA

EDMONTON-CALGARY DAYLINER, southbound train 194, about midday on Mar 23 was wrecked at Carstairs, between Red Deer and Calgary. The Dayliner, which was late, following a minor collision with a pickup truck, ran thru an open switch and hit a sulphur car in a siding. First reports said that five people were killed, including the engineer, and 10 were injured. The train, which was traveling at about 100 km/hr, was damaged up to its mid-section. A CP crew was working in the area, and reportedly one of the track crewmen told rescuers that he was responsible for the switch set wrong. He was treated for shock. The engineer had no sign that the switch was set to divert the train into the siding. VIA substituted a conventional coach, baggage-coach and diesel engine for the wrecked equipment.

PRESENT VIA SYSTEM TIMETABLE, set to expire Apr 23, will remain in effect until approximately the end of May.

LRC train 48 the CAVALIER, arrives in Ottawa. Photo by Bob Rynerson.

SLOWDOWN OFLRC trains to 80mph maximum continues due to problems with the trucks, leading to alleged damage to CN's tracks. The upshot is that VIA will lengthen the Montreal-Toronto schedules by 45minutes (and may now regret the hasty sidelining of the TurboTrains.

A THOROUGH REORGANIZATION is underway at VIA Rail. In this, the Finance and Administration groups, composed largely of people with no railway background, are taking over, according to a well-placed VIA source. In the current budget panic they are trying to check out everyone else's accounts, and are raising hackles.

VIA ATLANTIC REGION may soon disappear, to be merged with VIA Quebec. VIA Atlantic's VP Allan Raftus will soon retire, with honours, providing the occasion for a merger.

VIA WILL ABOLISH redcaps soon at the Ottawa station, in a money-saving experiment. If the experiment is deemed successful, it will be spread system-wide. A new lift for wheelchairs at the Ottawa station, which no one knows how to use, will be of little use without redcaps to move it into position. Another VIA economy move, which sounds penny-wise and pound-foolish, is the substitution of plastic for glass tumblers on the VIA I first class service. Sniffed one executive observed in an Ottawa-Montreal club car on Mar 4, "This sort of move merely degrades the product while economizing little."

MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT'S so-called VIA reforms have been discredited, with the slowdown of Montreal-Toronto trains the last failing element of those reforms, notes rail critics. To counter the effects on ridership of the slower speeds, VIA Marketing has had to invent a scheme whereby business people will get a package with hotel room and return rail tickets. It is well-known that extra off-peak corridor trains are under-patronized, that ridership sagged with the loss of the ATLANTIC and SUPER CONTINENTAL, and that VIA losses have soared.

THE NDP PARTY, via leader Ed Broadbent and transportation critic Les Benjamin, has proposed a scheme to compete with Pepin's "crow rate" reform. The NDP would give only $380 million a year to the railways to cover the cost of shipping grain. The rest ($550 million) would be in the form of direct public investment in railway branch lines, hopper cars, mainline improvements and start on electrification from Winnipeg to Thunder Bay. Critics say that this scheme would promise more to the taxpayer and the rail passenger, as the money could not be simply diverted into investments in CN and CP non-rail subsidiaries and thus siphoned off in profits realized by the subsidiaries.

URBAN-SUBURBAN TRANSIT

THREE EASTERN CITIES' transit strikes continue as we go to press, with little chance for quick settlements--New Jersey Transit, New York's Metro-North, and SEPTA in Philadelphia.

THE BUDD COMPANY is behind schedule in delivering transit cars to Baltimore and Miami. Both systems are anxious to open as soon as possible, and are vying with each other for first cracks at the cars, which are being produced under a joint purchasing agreement for the two new subway systems.

LONG BEACH TROLLEY line now in the planning stage will pass one step in May, when a choice will be made on alternatives for the L.A. downtown portion of the route. It was revealed in late March that planners are now leaning toward elevated portions of the line or possibly even in subway, and toward double-tracking instead of some of the original single-tracking. These alternatives are expected to raise the costs of construction from about $254 million to $290 million.

THE HOUSTON MTA on Mar 5 announced plans for the second and third phases of its planned 94.2-mile transit system. Plans include a line to the Intercontinental Airport; this would be a heavy-rail section. Other parts of the plan involve light rail and people mover lines. Most of phase two is light rail. A people mover is to run along the West Loop between Southwest and Katy Freeways. Phase three, to be built after the year 2000, is estimated to include 27 stations on 40.4 miles of line. Houston's project has not yet received any federal funding.

FERRY BUILDING EXTENSION of the San Francisco Caltrain line seems dead, after opposition by city officials and planners, including SPUR, the S.F. Planning and Urban Research Association. Objections to the plan center around noise and disruption caused by railroad cars in the Ferry Building area and Embarcadero.

CORRECTION: We reported in RTN 259, page 11, that the Evanston IL Davis Street Station had been damaged by fire. That should have been the Main Street Station. As of last month it was still boarded up, and commuters wait out in the cold.

THE WASHINGTON POST in a Mar 13 editorial criticized Metro for deciding to open the Yellow line next, at the end of April. The Blue line should be opened next, argued the paper. Both lines are ready to go, but there aren't enough subway cars available yet.

CENSUS BUREAU DATA just becoming available indicate that public transit usage for the nation has declined to 6% of workers, from 9% in 1970. The reasons are believed to be migration to the Sun Belt where the automobile is king, and dispersal of jobs to suburbs in older urban areas with established transit systems. The NY Times says the data raise again the issue of whether to fund maintenance of older systems or construction of new ones.

The Returning Dome

(The following is the text of Amtrak's March 21 press release announcing the return to revenue service of the first rebuilt dome car, car #9405:)

A fortunate group of Amtrak travelers, having already chosen the train as one of the safest and most comfortable modes of travel, will now be able to enjoy some of the world's finest wilderness scenery from the observation deck of a genuine dome coach.

The first of seven newly renovated dome coaches rolled out of Amtrak's Beech Grove, Indiana, maintenance facility March 15th. The rejuvenated car, originally built in 1954, will go into revenue service today as part of Amtrak's CAPITOL LIMITED, operating between Washington, D.C., and Chicago.

For part of its trip the CAPITOL LIMITED traverses the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad along the historic C&O Canal, crossing the Potomac River at Harpers Ferry, W.V., and following the B&O's famous Sand Patch grade to the summit of the Alleghenies. On the far side of the summit, the rushing waters of the Youghiogheny River provide spectacular scenery that is largely hidden from view to motorists.

The dome coaches, originally built for steam-activated heating, are being completely rebuilt and converted to all-electric, head-end powered cars. (In head-end powered or HEP equipment, electricity for heating, cooling and lighting is taken from the locomotive.)

Rebuilding each dome car costs some $450,000 and takes three months in the Beech Grove facility near Indianapolis. Amtrak expects to complete the rebuilding this year. Each car will be phased into service as it is completed.

The following is a brief history of the dome coaches now being rebuilt and returned to service.

RAILROAD HISTORY (PRE-AMTRAK)

BUILT: 1954.
MANUFACTURER: Budd Co., Red Lion, Pennsylvania.
ROUTE: NORTH COAST LIMITED, Chicago to Seattle/Portland (via southern Montana).

AMTRAK HISTORY

USAGE: May, 1971 thru as late as April, 1981. The dome coaches were taken out of service when Amtrak received new double deck Superliners, built by Pullman Standard.

AMTRAK ROUTES: Selected Amtrak routes west and south of Chicago.

There are 66 seats in each dome coach. Forty-six of these are revenue seats situated on either end of an elevated dome section. Reclining seats with leg rests insure complete comfort as passengers watch the countryside go by. There are twenty unreserved seats in the dome section located at the center of the car. These may be used by any passenger on the train.

To Florida First Class

by Walter E. Zullig, Jr.

My family and I spent a week in Miami, traveling both ways on Amtrak, using the new Florida First Class service. South Florida has had quite a bit of rain, but we lucked out. It was pouring as we detrained on Feb 19, but the rest of our week was warm and clear, and I was able to get some more good photos of SCL and FEC trains in the Miami-North Miami Beach-Hollywood-Fort Lauderdale area. Our daughter didn't join us, as she has classes in February. She had come down in January, going down on the METEOR, returning on the STAR. Her trip was good, but the trains were short and only half full (before the "All Aboard America" discount fares).

We departed New York on Friday, Feb 18 on a 19-car train. After Alexandria the train was almost completely full. Our SILVER METEOR had a baggage car, bag-dorm, three sleepers, one slumbercoach, nine Amfleet II coaches, two diners, one Amfleet II lounge, and one Heritage Fleet cafeteria-lounge. Ten of the cars went to Miami, eight to St. Petersburg, and one diner was left at Jacksonville.

Our sleeping car "Sycamore Grove" rode quite well. It had been an unnamed SP sleeper, but Amtrak applied a name when the car was converted to Heritage Fleet.

Shortly after we left New York, the attendant came thru with a basket containing wine, cheese and crackers. Also, each room was provided with a packet containing a timetable, stationery, comment card and information on the Florida First Class service. This obviously is a Graham Claytor touch--the SOUTHERN CRESCENT used to have something similar.

Meals are complimentary for first class passengers, but this doesn't result in any saving, since the rates were raised for Pullman space effective Dec 15--the bedroom went from $194 to $223. However, the meals were not bad, and the service overall was quite good. My one complaint was with the dinner reservation. After having marked our rooms on a diagram for the 6:15 sitting, we and three other parties found the dining car full and had to wait 20 minutes to be seated. The Steward said he really can't honor the reservations as other people came in and wanted to use the empty table 15 minutes before our time.

The southbound trip provided three interesting operational events. First, our diesels had not arrived from Ivy City and we were 20 minutes late leaving Washington. Second, we had a red signal at Auburndale; after a telephone call it was learned that northbound train 88 was on the circuit, enroute St. Petersburg to Jacksonville. So for the first time a got a shot of an Amtrak train crossing the diamond with another Amtrak train waiting. I wonder how many times a year that happens? The third incident was a half-hour delay waiting for #97 at Boynton Beach siding. We couldn't be advanced to the next siding at Yamato because it was occupied by a long southbound freight which we were to overtake. Our 22-minute lateness at Miami was entirely attributed to this meet.

Originally, we had wanted to return on the SILVER STAR. When the reservations were made in early November, no space was available. Some time around Jan 10 we obtained a bedroom on the SILVER METEOR, and had called Amtrak from time to time since then, but nothing opened up on the STAR. While in Miami, I called Amtrak two or three times a day, but #92 was entirely sold out--not even a single coach seat had been available all week!

Altho we went to Miami, our return was from Ft. Lauderdale mainly because the car rental company would not accept the car at the Amtrak station, but wanted it returned to their office near the airport. This fact was actually handier for us, and saved us about an hour over Miami. Altho their Miami office said cars

could not be returned to Ft. Lauderdale station, the rental company's agent does accept them there--she drove us to the station and then opened the desk to accept returns from other passengers.

As we had heard up north, the ground appeared saturated with water in many locations. The lakes and streams were quite high due to the heavy rains of the previous month. But we enjoyed good weather, and in addition to normal train chasing, we rode the Gold Coast Railroad on Sunday, and spent much time swimming.

Our returning SILVER METEOR had 11 cars out of Miami, including a heavyweight private car. The single engine was losing time, and took a long time to attain 80mph, due at least in part to the heavy private car. The radio was somewhat more informative than usual, as the engineer kept the conductor posted as to all developments.

With but a few exceptions, the train had the same cars we had on #87-97 on Feb 18-19. We were in the same sleeper we occupied on that train. While we passed thru the train we took the opportunity to try the new Amfleet II coaches, and found them to be quiet and comfortable. Each car has 59 seats, a single vestibule and hand-operated side doors. The car interiors are quiet even with the end doors open, and the non-vestibule end is especially quiet. From the noise standpoint, the optimum seats would be around seat 40--about two-thirds back in the car. The one drawback is that these cars which seat 59 passengers have but two

CONSISTS OF THE AUTHOR'S TRAINS

*SILVER METEOR, train 87, New York Feb 18: engine 973 (NY-Wash.), 355 & 388 (Wash-Jacksonville) (355 to Miami, 388 to St. Pete); cars 1374, 1619, 2447 "Sycamore Grove", 2454 "Redwood Grove", 2093 "Loch Katrina", 25024, 25011, 25042, 25050, 28005, 8508, 8500, 3127, 25004, 25053, 25049, 25026, 25021, 2436 "Pacific Crest."

*SILVER METEOR, train 88, leaving Jacksonville FL Feb 26: engines 377 & 384; cars 1145, 1619, 2447, 2454, 2093, 25024, 25011, 25050, 25078, 28004, 8508, 8523, 3120, 25014, 25035, 25071, 25002, 2453 "Cedar Grove", 2438 "Pacific Castle", ACE #1 "Independence."

washrooms with no separate dressing rooms. I should think passengers would encounter long delays getting into the bathrooms in the morning. With that exception, the cars appear excellent, and I look forward to making a trip in them soon. Besides on the Florida trains, Amfleet II cars now grace the consists of the LAKE SHORE LIMITED and BROADWAY LIMITED as well. Climate control was perfect in all cars in both directions--gone are the "good old days" of A/C failures!

During the layover at Jacksonville I discovered that the private car on the end of our train is American Coal Enterprises #1, owned by Ross Rowland, who now is an Amtrak director. It's quite a beautiful car, complete with color TV. Rowland, his wife, and only one or two others appeared to be in the car. I also noted that an additional 10-6 sleeper was coupled in ahead of the ACE #1; this sleeper was open, as several persons boarded it at Jacksonville. During the switching the Miami section was left intact. The St. Pete baggage car was coupled ahead of the Miami cars, a diner was added to the rear, followed by the St. Pete coaches and sleeper, then by the extra Miami sleeper and ACE #1. Despite the extra switching, we departed Jacksonville only two minutes late.

Ross Rowland soon came on the radio to ask the engineer whether the train was able to make its running time with the long consist. We appeared able to do so, except for two stops for false indications from hot box detectors. The conductor was suspicious of car #1, but the radio transmission referred to third axle, left side, which would be the locomotive. Nothing was found either time. Mr. Rowland had the names of all the engineers and conductors, and called them on the radio from time to time to inquire about operating conditions. His party and the car were going to New York.

Our dinner was quite good, and the wait was minimal this time. I stopped in the Miami lounge car for a martini while my son searched the train for my wife, who had wandered into the St. Pete section lounge car and met a friend there. We were joined at the table by a lady who had just boarded at Jessup, Georgia, after a few days visiting her parents there. She had started at Miami and was enroute to Baltimore. After dinner I checked out the St. Pete section and found it nearly full. Our Miami section had about 25 empty seats and a few empty roomettes. I heard the information come to the conductor over the radio that the four St. Pete coaches had only six empty seats.

After the on-time departure from Florence, South Carolina, I persuaded my wife to come back to the sleeper; she had met some friends who were planning to sack out in the lounge car all night.

I awoke about 6:15am with the jolt of the electric motor coupling on at Washington. The attendant arrived with orange juice after Baltimore, and we noted that the day was quite different from yesterday in Florida: the sun was out and the sky blue.

Between Baltimore and Wilmington the 20-car train ate up the miles at a steady 90mph, and we arrived Wilmington ahead of schedule. Everyone else must have been up much earlier, since we entered the diner at 8:15 and were the only group left when we finished. On this trip the crew had applied a rubber stamp to the checks used for complimentary meals to first class passengers. The stamp provided spaces for the passenger's signature, ticket number, car and room number. The crew did not appear to be verifying this information against the ticket, but did ask the car number. Perhaps they checked it against the space manifest.

Our arrival in New York was 12 minutes early--the first time I've EVER experienced this returning from Florida. On a scale of 1-10, I'd rate the overall performance at 9. The drawbacks were: (1) failure to use the dinner reservation as promised in the advertising material; and (2) failure to deliver all of the first class services--namely, the evening sweets and shoe shine.

We had lucked out with the fares, however. Amtrak instituted its "All Aboard America" fare shortly before I purchased the ticket. This reduced my $302 fare to $125, and we still were granted the Week-of-Wheels car. Moreover, I reserved a "free" trip from New York to Montreal, going via the MONTREALER and returning via the ADIRONDACK, as an extra bonus. I hope to be able to use it before March 20, when my ticket expires!

THE PANIC BOX

Highlights of Amtrak operating problems during the month of February

Ten NE Corridor trains and 27 local trains were delayed from 2 to 41 minutes on Feb 1 when a power transformer malfunctioned in substation 40, west of Newark NJ at 4:29pm. By 4:59pm the problem was cleared up.

The SOUTHWEST LIMITED, train 4 of Jan 31, hit an 8-foot snow drift at Ingalls KS, 17 miles west of Dodge City, which bent the pilot on engine 290 and necessitated a reduced speed. At Howell, the pilot was cut off. At Dodge City, Santa Fe engine 6325 was added on the point. The engines could not be wyed there because the turntable was jammed with snow. The train lost 3 hours' time.

The PIONEER, train 26 of Feb 2, was terminated at La Grande OR due to an auxiliary generator failure in engine 216. Passengers were bused on, leaving 195' late.

The SOUTHWEST LIMITED, train 3 of Feb 1, went thru five engines before it could find a properly functioning one. Before Dodge City KS, engines 292 & 286 both developed ground relay action. At Dodge City, ATSF engines 6382 & 6365 were added, but both developed the same problem. At La Junta, ATSF engine 5207 was substituted but it developed the problem. At Winslow AZ ATSF 5006 was substituted and evidently ran alright. The train lost a total of 211 minutes.

High winds caused signal failure on the Seaboard's Jacksonville Division at 5am on Feb 2, delaying both Florida trains & the PALMETTO an hour or more.

Snow in the Tehachapis caused cancellation of bus connections to/from the SAN JOAQUINS Feb 2-3. Some passengers were housed overnight. One bus was caught in a traffic jam and was thought to be stranded in the snow.

The ILLINOIS ZEPHYR, train 348 of Feb 5, was annulled due to a BN freight derailment 17½ miles east of West Quincy.

Because snow was not removed from the depot platform at LaCrosse WI, the EMPIRE BUILDER, train 7 of Feb 4, crossed over at Grand Island Crossing in order to enter depot on the wrong track, with a delay of 28mins.

At 10:45pm on Feb 4, Kansas City Terminal police received a call from a male stating "The bomb is set--your time is running out." Kansas City police were called to the station with bloodhounds and searched it, including all checked baggage. Train 3 of Feb 4 arrived at 11:12pm but no one was allowed on or off until 12:10am, when the search was over. No bomb was found.

The NORTH STAR, train 10 was annulled on Feb 5 due to hot wheels on engine 301.

A passenger was arrested at Ogden on the SF ZEPHYR, train 5 of Feb 4, allegedly using a stolen credit card.

The ELECTRIC CITY EXPRESS, train 483, was annulled on Feb 6 Schenectady to Albany when Turbo 158's brakes would not release.

The COAST STARLIGHT, train 14 of Feb 6, was delayed 71mins between Roseville & Tehama on Feb 7 because of severe rain, and 40mph slow orders. Slow orders remained in effect for several days.

A woman passenger on the CRESCENT, train 20 of Feb 7 reported being robbed of all her money and valuables on the train. Amtrak arranged for the bus connection she needed to get to her final destination.

The ADIRONDACK, train 69 of Feb 9, was delayed 50mins by a D&H freight derailment at Rouses Point.

The MONTREALER, train 60 of Feb 9, was delayed 101mins by a broken rail 18 miles south of Brattleboro VT on the B&M CT River Route. Crew had to repair rail before train could pass.

Connecticut Valley Service train 473 on Feb 10 was annulled south of Hart due to a mechanical problem with SPV50. Passengers delayed 2 hours.

THE BIG BLIZZARD: At 10pm on Thurs, Feb 10 snow began falling in the NE Corridor, and by the time it stopped 24 hours later, 26 inches had fallen. All major cities in the Mid-Atlantic region suffered this major storm, called by the National Weather Service one of the worst in this century. All modes of transportation except railroad were brought to a standstill. All Amtrak trains operated from their points of origin, and only a few combined to minimize congestion at major terminals and in yard areas. Thirty Amtrak trains were delayed between 95 and 245mins turning engines from inbound trains at Washington as a result of limited routing thru the terminal switches. All available equipment and food service personnel were utilized. As the blizzard progressed into the 11th, food supplies ran short at the Washington facility. Outside sources were utilized as well as shipments of food from up-line commissaries. Most trains in the NEC experienced few problems, with few passenger complaints, as trains were THE ONLY MODE OF TRAVEL OPERATING.

The Amtrak Reservation Office in Chicago, on the 38th floor of an office skyscraper, was evacuated Feb 11 when a fire in an electrical cabinet on the 46th floor filled the building with the odor of burning insulation. Fire began at 6:30am. Six agents were hospitalized, 24 went off sick.

On Sunday Feb 13, 46 Amtrak Corridor trains were delayed up to 48mins due to snow conditions. Today, with the exception of trains 294 & 297, all Metroliners were combined with other regular train service in order to minimize delays due to congestion. Full service operation will resume Monday.

The CARDINAL, train 50 of Feb 13, hit two boulders 24.4 miles west of Prince WV at 10:55pm the 13th. Engine 325 and cars 1365 and 2433 were damaged. Train

limped into Hinton WV and was terminated (arriving 5hrs late). Passengers bused.

A telephoned bomb threat, saying there was a bomb on a train at New Orleans, was received at 8:15am by the Jacksonville Central Reservation Office on Feb 16. The CRESCENT, train 20 of the 16th, was stopped at Pearl River LA and searched, then allowed to continue after a 3hr, 17min delay. Equipment of trains 1 and 58 were also examined at New Orleans, but nothing was found. 320 passengers on the 16-car, 2-engine CRESCENT were bused to Slidell LA Municipal Auditorium and given coffee and pastry while the search went on. An on-time makeup section of train 20 was run Washington-NY.

Metro-North RR's Hudson line lost CTC control at 10:45am Feb 17 when workers accidentally severed a cable at Manitou. Eight Amtrak trains were delayed from 14 to 98 minutes on the Empire Service route.

A rockslide 23 miles west of Reno NV blocked one track and delayed the SF ZEPHYR of Feb 17 (train 6) 70mins. Train 5 of Feb 17 was delayed 1¼ hours the same day by a BN freight derailment 35 miles west of McCook NE.

The EAGLE, train 22 of the 16th, had mechanical problems and lost electric power after leaving Texarkana TX. It was delayed 5hrs but could not be fixed. It went on to Little Rock without HEP, to be worked on there.

The PIONEER, train 25 of the 17th, was delayed 100mins by a UP freight derailment at East Motanic OR, 15mis west of La Grande, the morning of Feb 19.

The CITY OF NEW ORLEANS, train 59 of the 18th, was without HEP from Fulton to Memphis, where the engines were wyed. Train was delayed 1hr, 43mins.

Both EMPIRE BUILDERS of the 19th were blocked by a BN freight derailment at East Glasgow MT at 6:10am Feb 20. Passengers were bused between trains and the trains turned. No. 8 was delayed 3hr, 30mins, no. 7 delayed 8hrs.

SAN DIEGAN #574 had an engine failure just east of Fullerton CA on Feb 20 on engine 238, delaying the train 1hr, 28mins.

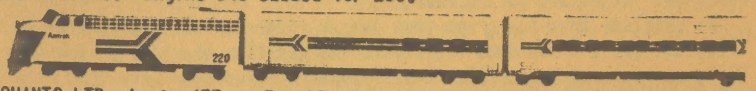
A passenger on the SILVER STAR, train 82 of the 19th, was arrested at Washington by Amtrak police Feb 20 and charged with 5 counts of assault with a deadly weapon, a toy rifle. One passenger was treated at a hospital.

The CARDINAL, train 50 of Feb 20 terminated at Charlottesville due to failure of both engines. 133 passengers transferred to train 20 of the 20th, with delay to passengers of 149mins. On-time section of #50 was run Washington-NY.

The SF ZEPHYR, train 5 of the 19th was forced to detour Carlin NV to Weso on WP due to an SP freight derailment 31 miles east of Winnemucca. 47" delay.

The PALMETTO, train 89 of the 25th, had a hot box on car 4615 north of Washington at 10:59am. Car 4715 substituted at Washington. 66" delay.

The HOOSIER STATE, train 318 of the 25th, left Chicago 1hr, 20mins late due to an engine failure. Engine 310 subbed for 280.



The MERCHANTS LTD, train 177 on Feb 25 stopped because of equipment damage of unspecified origin (hitting debris?) at Elkton MD at 10:58pm. Last 5 cars of 10-car train had brake line damage and had to be cut off. Train was delayed 87mins, 25 of them while crew convinced a group of school children and 5 chaperones to move up to another car.

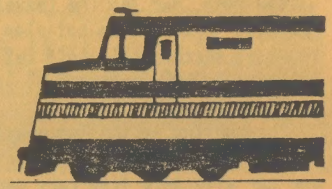
The COAST STARLIGHT, train 14 on Feb 26 was held up an hour behind an SP freight with a hot box at Elmira CA, 25 miles east of Davis.

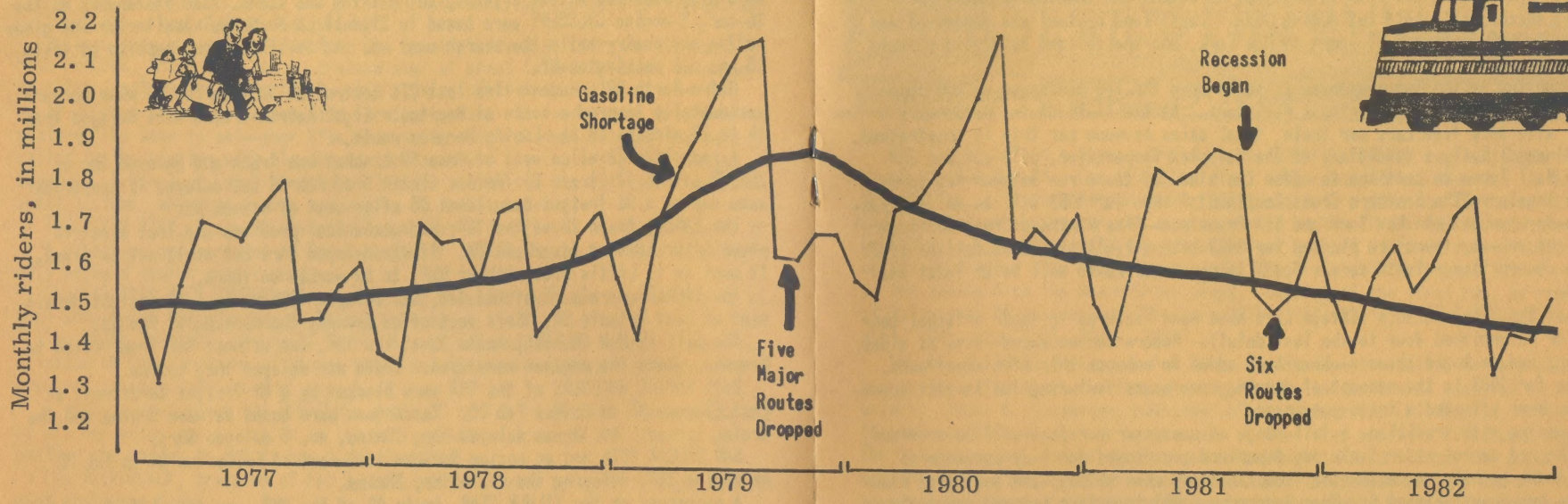
SPIRIT OF CALIFORNIA, train 15 of the 26th, had a ruptured oil line at Soledad CA and was delayed 1hr, 52mins for repairs.

High water and washouts on the Santa Fe Second District between L.A. & San Bernardino caused the DESERT WIND, trains 35 of the 25th and 36 of the 27th, and SOUTHWEST LIMITED #4 of the 27th to detour on the Santa Fe Third District between those points, with no delay on detour, but delays for buses from missed stations Pomona and Pasadena.

The MERCHANTS LTD, train 176 on Feb 27 hit debris at Oak interlocking and was terminated, with 50" delay to passengers. Brake lines damaged.

What's Happening to Amtrak Ridership?





Our curiosity aroused by the appearance in the national newspaper USA Today on Mar 21 of a graph of Amtrak ridership from 1977 thru 1982. The graph showed that ridership began a steady decline in 1980, so that 1982 was lower than the year 1977. Said the accompanying article, "Amtrak wants to increase its fiscal 1983 ridership to almost 21 million from 1982's disappointing 19 million. However, it's not sure whether it will reach its goal because bookings only began picking up in February." (We all know why bookings picked up in February and not in January, but that's a separate question.)

We wanted a closer look at month-by-month ridership during those years, and so we prepared the above graph. Our graph is by calendar year rather than fiscal year, but the result is the same.

We conclude from the graph that Amtrak ridership was pretty flat in 1977 and 1978, but got a tremendous boost from the gasoline shortage in the late spring of 1979, and this energy-crisis consciousness carried over into 1980. In 1981 the recession gradually began, with a slow and gradual depressing effect upon patronage. But one of the most serious blows to Amtrak ridership was the vicious and untimely attack upon the Amtrak system by the Carter Administration in 1979. The great momentum that train patronage had built up because of the gasoline shortage was dealt a hard blow by the discontinuance of five major routes and by all the "negative advertising" surrounding the DOT efforts to cut back Amtrak. Another big cutback was made in the fall of 1981. Amtrak patronage has shown a general decline ever since the cutback of 1979 (as shown by the smooth, heavy line, which we have fitted by hand to show the general trend of the data).

Another very important factor was at work in shaping these data. That is the frequent and large fare increases instigated by Amtrak. It was not possible for us to indicate these on the graph, but they must certainly have had a strong depressing effect on patronage over the years, and particularly accelerating in the most recent years, during the Reagan Administration, while Amtrak has been working hard to increas revenue, even at the expense of ridership.

We asked Amtrak about its interpretation of the graphs shown in USA Today. Declining ridership is the result of "suicidal air fare wars" and "general economic conditions, with a general lack of travel", Amtrak said. Amtrak said that its new fares and ads had, however, begun to stem the tide, and ridership is on the upswing again. (Our graph wouldn't be able to reflect that, as the latest figures aren't in yet.) Amtrak said that present ridership is not ahead of 1982 overall, but the trend is reversed. The rail corporation said that the All Aboard America fares had sold over $10 million in tickets thru Mar 24, accounting for about 26% of its revenues for the period (from Feb 1, when the fares began).

Amtrak feels, a spokesman said, that ridership is down not because of high fares but because of airline fare cuts made to maintain their market shares, while on the other hand (unlike the airlines) Amtrak wants to keep its revenue level up. Amtrak says that revenues are up, despite lower ridership.

All of this leads to a philosophical debate of whether Amtrak should aim for more riders (serving the public) or more revenue (saving the taxpayer dollars). The writer of the USA article was aware of this conflict, and reported: "But Amtrak is caught between being a public service and a private enterprise pressured to raise revenues."

The airlines are private enterprise, but right now they're going for passengers regardless of income. Pan Am on Mar 30 announced that it would undercut the mileage-based fare formula of its rivals, in a move that Amtrak feels is "suicidal."

We hope that this presentation will stir up more debate about Amtrak ridership and its fare policy. We hope that people will consider our thesis too that the periodic cutbacks in routes on Amtrak have a deleterious effect on the rail corporation by seriously affecting its patronage to a degree that requires some time and effort to overcome. The big cutback of the Carter administration was particularly outrageous, coming at a time when people were flocking to the trains in the gasoline shortage. They wanted to ride and the government said no.

CONTINENTAL RAIL WILL TAKE OVER RAIL CRUISES

(The following is the text of a press release from Railplex Corporation:)

New York, Mar 14: The Travel Division of the American Express Company announced recently that it does not plan to continue to market the transcontinental rail tours it successfully sold out during 1982. This "land cruise" was conceived and operated by 20th Century Rail Tours of New York, who specialized solely in private rail car travel.

The parting of the two companies is based upon the low passenger volume capacity nature afforded by the private rail cars. At the limit of ten passengers per car with only five cars per train, total sales revenue per trip is constrained.

Continental Rail, a subsidiary of the Railplex Corporation, will succeed 20th Century Rail Tours to continue to offer the nine-day tours run between New York and Los Angeles--"The Southern Cross Continent." New for 1983 will be an additional nine-day run between New York and San Francisco--"The Northern Cross Continent." Only eight one-way tours are planned for 1983 with a limit of accommodations of 25 couples aboard five private cars. Staff to passenger ratio will be at least one-to-three.

All of the 30's and 40's vintage cars have been restored to their original condition or refurbished down to the last detail. Modern conveniences--such as video equipment and on-board showers--have been added to enhance this rich experience. Also new for 1983 is the concept of drawing room space featuring the largest accomodations ever afforded a train passenger.

In keeping with tradition, a full range of passenger services will be provided, including red carpet at arrivals and departures; corsages for lady passengers; fresh linens nightly; a manicurist; complimentary shoe shines; and our famed pianist, the broadway lyricist Mr. Beau Bergersen. All transfers between the train and hotels will be by chauffered limousine.

On-board dining will be under the direction of professional chefs assisted by experienced railroad cooks. The gourmet menu will continue to feature both Continental and Regional cuisine; and the 1983 cruises will continue to include several famous traditional railroad recipes as well as Baked Alaska and a post dessert cheese board.

Twenty-four hour bar and room service will feature "snacks" on the order of caviar on toast points, fresh oysters and premium brand beverages.

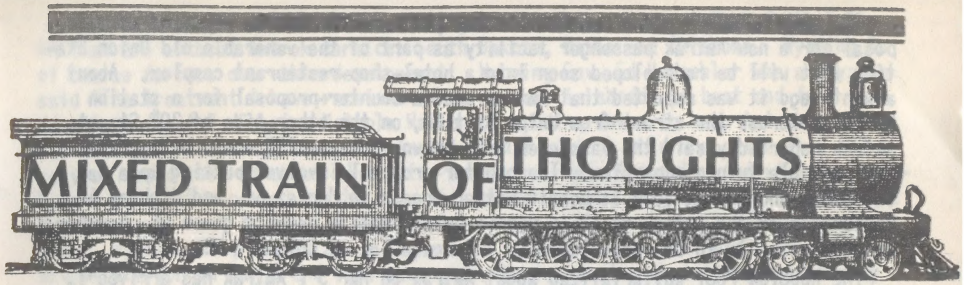
Some returning staff members will be semi-retired ex-Pullman porters who served on well-known trains during the 40's and 50's.

"The tours will follow the historic routes of the great trains," said Gary Lumsden, a Director of Continental Rail, "such as the BROADWAY between New York and Chicago; the CALIFORNIA ZEPHYR between Chicago and San Francisco (by special arrangement with Amtrak, Continental Rail will now travel the famed Denver and Rio Grande route--via the Rocky Mountains--between Denver and Salt Lake City); and the SUNSET LIMITED between New Orleans and Los Angeles."

"Regardless of itinerary, passengers will experience some of America's most interesting cities," Lumsden continued, "for this reason no on-board segment of the cruise will last more than 36 hours. The 'Southern Cross-Continent' hotels have been chosen because of their association with traditional luxury. Passengers will stay at hotels such as the Waldorf Astoria in New York; the Royal Orleans in New Orleans; the Westward Look in Tucson and the Beverly Wilshire in Los Angeles. Traveling the 'Northern Cross-Continent' the featured deluxe hotels include the St. Francis in San Francisco; Del Webb's Casino Hotel in Reno; the Brown Palace in Denver; the Drake in Chicago and again, the Waldorf Astoria in New York."

The one-way fare will be $2795 to $3395 per passenger regardless of route selected. The fare covers everything except meals in stopover cities. Air fare to and from departure and arrival cities is also additional...

(For further information, contact Gary Lumsden or J.T. Lamkin, PO Box 4225, Grand Central Station, New York NY 10163, or phone 212-420-1622.)



FIRST DOME CAR in revenue service on the CAPITOL LIMITED ran westbound from Washington on Mar 21. Car 9405, the first dome coach to be converted to HEP at Beech Grove, is former Amtrak number 9483, and before that was Northern Pacific 556. Under Amtrak the car saw service mostly on the EMPIRE BUILDER and the FLORIDIAN. A Washington TV crew rode the car a short distance out of Washington on its first run. The remaining cars for the train will be phased into service as the emerge from the Beech Grove shops.. Consist of the first run, as recorded at McKeesport PA was: engine 294; cars 1174, 1137, 25111, 2990 "Joseph V. MacDonald", 2883, dome 9405, 25086, 28011.....

THE BIG BLIZZARD that began Feb 10 in the Northeast resulted in very poor reporting in the media about the fine showing that passenger trains made, as we noted before. James B. Stevenson, publisher of the Titusville (PA) Herald, tells us that the only mention of Amtrak he ever saw at that time was in a Pittsburgh paper and the Baltimore Sun, and belatedly in the Washington Post. In his own paper he editorialized: "During the Blizzard of '83 most newspaper writers and all television newscasters ignored railroad passenger trains--probably because they had never ridden on one. The news people are quite young for the most part, some hardly dry behind the ears. It's therefore no wonder why they didn't write about railroad trains".....

* * *

TAMPA-ST. PETERSBURG service change, considered at Amtrak's Mar 16 Board meeting, will be subject to public comment for 60 days before Amtrak makes a final decision on the change. The proposal is to drop train service between the two above cities, substituting dedicated bus service, Tampa-Clearwater and Tampa- St. Petersburg. The trains would be met by the buses at the arrival platform at Tampa, and Amtrak personnel would transfer all checked and hand-carried baggage directly from train to bus. The SILVER STAR and SILVER METEOR would both be affected by the change. The Miami-Tampa SILVER PALM already has dedicated bus connections at Tampa. Amtrak said the change would provide improved service to many persons by reducing trip times from as much as 1hr, 45mins to St. Pete and 1hr, 10mins to Clearwater, to only 30mins to each station by bus. It would also "provide an entirely new service to a beachfront location in both Clearwater Beach and St. Petersburg Beach." Amtrak says it would save $1.6 million annually by the switch, which would improve by 4% the financial performance of the Florida trains (in terms of loss per psgr/mile), and would have "no discernible impact on connecting parts of the route system." The public comment period runs Mar 17 to May 16. Comments should be sent to M.L. Clark Tyler, Group VP, Passenger Services and Communications, Amtrak, PO Box 37631, Washington DC 20013. A toll-free number is also available: 800-368-0103. In Washington DC, call 347-4352. At the end of the public comment period, a summary of the substance of the comments will be presented to Amtrak Board for use in making a final decision. (A question: Why did Amtrak not need a public comment period for the switch of the SF ZEPHYR to the Rio Grande line? Answer: The change did not involve system end-points, and it did not involve a significantly large population shift, says Amtrak).....

ST. LOUIS STATION plans are not settled yet. In RTN 260 we reported on a proposal for a new Amtrak passenger facility as part of the venerable old Union Station that will be redeveloped soon into a hotel-shop-restaurant complex. About a month ago it was reported that Amtrak made a counter-proposal for a station building across the street from Union Station, on the other side of 20th Street. Amtrak reportedly said the passenger area shown in issue 260 would be too small for possible future expansion. The counter-proposal involves putting up a new building, and Amtrak said it permit better access to Market St. and Highway 40. Proponents of the Amtrak facility within Union Station haven't given up, however. Union Station is to be redeveloped by the Rouse Co. of Columbia MD.....

THE HOUSTON POST editorialized about Amtrak on Mar 5 ("Amtrak has arrived"). Quote: "The little train thought it could, and it has. But having proved what it can do in the Northeast corridor, having proved the willingness of Americans to take the train when it is the easiest and most convenient way to go, Amtrak should be given the wherewithall to provide the Washington-to-New York kind of service on trains linking Dallas and Houston, Houston and San Antonio, Houston and New Orleans. The start should be made before the oil glut dries up and gasoline prices begin to rise again".....

FEDERAL GASOLINE TAX, a 5¢ per gallon increase, takes effect Apr 1.....

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APRIL SCHEDULE CHANGES on Amtrak, to take effect Apr 24, will include having all Metroliners, including express Metroliners, stop at Newark NJ. Amtrak will open a ticket office in the World Trade Center in lower Manhattan on Apr 4. This will enable businesspersons there to buy a ticket at a convenient location, take PATH to Newark to an express Metroliner which will get them to Washington in 2hrs, 37mins. The LAKE SHORE LIMITED will have 1hr, 22mins cut out of its time in each direction between Chicago and New York. Most of the time saved is due to slow orders on Conrail being lifted, which had kept the train at 35 or 45 mph in places. As noted previously, the CAPITOL LIMITED eastbound will leave Chicago at about 5pm, which schedule will inconvenience Pittsburgh. But Amtrak said that the PENNSYLVANIAN will have its schedule adjusted to help those traveling from Pittsburgh eastward. The reason for the CAPITOL change, Amtrak said, is to make the run more viable for businesspeople, with a midday arrival in New York instead of in the afternoon.....

PARAMOUNT PICTURES FILMED some scenes for the movie "Trading Places" in Newark station and in Philadelphia's 30th St. station recently. Filming was scheduled originally for Feb 11, but the film crew tried to travel to the station by bus and were snowed out in the big blizzard. Filming was done both in the station and on board a special Amfleet train with AEM-7 locomotive.....

OTHER SPECIAL TRAINS scheduled in February included a New Jersey Chamber of Commerce special Feb 3-4, an engineering test train Baltimore-DC-Baltimore and DC-Boston-DC Feb 1-4, Philadelphia Orchestra train Phila-NY-Phila Feb 8 and repeat Feb 22, Chicago Orchestra train Chicago-Milwaukee-Chicago Feb 28, a "hospital train" of bad-order cars Denver-Chicago Feb 27-28, and of course the Reno Fun Trains.....

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AN IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT is scheduled to come from Amtrak at a press conference on Apr 5. We will have gone to press with this issue before then, and Amtrak could not breathe a word of the announcement before that date.....

AMERICAN RAIL SUPPORTERS would do well to keep a close eye on Continental Airlines, cautions a Canadian source. According to Dave Todd of Southam News Services, "the giant Los Angeles-based, Texas-controlled air carrier's lobbying efforts have been increasingly successful since the deregulation-minded Reagan Administration took office. Continental, virtually bankrupt two years ago, has won many of its most important successes thru fierce political lobbying." Remember Greyhound efforts vs Amtrak?.....

WYOMING'S LOSING AMTRAK will make it join the three other states of the lower 48 that are without Amtrak service: South Dakota, Maine and Oklahoma. Wyoming is of course furious over this development. Wyoming Gov. Ed Herschler was angry; he said "The treatment I have received (from Amtrak) is shoddy at best and full of deceit at worst." Senator Malcolm Wallop of Wyoming vowed to keep Amtrak service "if not thru reasoning, then thru legislation." Amtrak told the state that 403-b service would cost it about $1 million per year. Unfortunately, the state's legislature had just recessed at the time this matter arose, but it seems unlikely that Wyoming would want to come up with that much money to assure rail passenger service. Wyoming Congressmen and a Governor's assistant met with Amtrak President Graham Claytor on Mar 1 and came away with the impression that Amtrak was pretty "single-minded" about its decision. Wyoming rail supporters have attempted to convince Amtrak to run both the Wyoming and the Rio Grande routes at least on a one-year experimental basis.....

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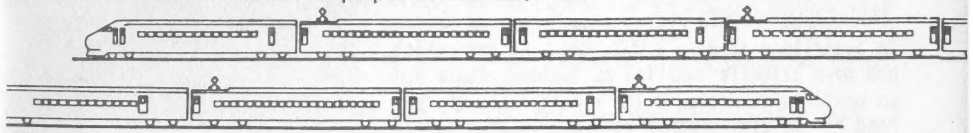
BULLET TRAIN DEVELOPMENTS: Since publication of the Bullet Train report in our last issue, the following news has appeared. Two changes in the route map were made on Mar 21: Del Mar was dropped as a Bullet Train stop, and a station near the University of California, San Diego was substituted. Added to the list of stops was Norwalk, which is the home of the head of the Assembly Transportation Committee, Bruce Young. The Los Angeles Times reported problems with the Bullet Train line to the L.A. International Airport (LAX). The airport is crowded, and airport officials are not happy about seeing more passengers funneled into it, and they conclude that Orange County officials want the train because it will save them from building another airport themselves--Orange County residents could easily take the train to LAX. But LAX is in the throes of an expensive renovation program and the Bullet Train entry there would force more expense and more problems of construction at LAX, including building an underground train station. The Times reported that Bullet Train backers believe the project cannot succeed without the airport line to attract more riders, but building that line may be problemmatic. The Times also emphasized that much public money will be needed to beef up transit systems to feed the line, despite the fact that Bullet Train proponents call the project a privately funded one. The Times noted also that L.A. Union Station will be mobbed with 10 times the number of people it now has.



Testimony before the state Assembly Transportation Committee on Mar 18 revealed that backers of the project must submit environmental impactreports to the Federal Highway Administration, to the Coastal Commission and to at least one state agency before work could begin. All of those agencies must approve the reports. Larry Gilson of American High Speed Rail said that more studies must be carried out to determine realistically what level of physical improvement can be expected from transit agencies feeding the Bullet Train line, and still permit a profit to be made on the operation. The LAX line is vital to the Bullet Train project, the L.A. Times said, and it is to carry 27% of the line's passengers.....

AMTRAK INSPECTION TRAIN surveyed the St. Louis-Carbondale route of ICG on Mar 17 in conjunction with a proposed Kansas City section of the Chicago-New Orleans CITY OF NEW ORLEANS.....

AMTRAK'S CAPITAL FUNDING plan for Fiscal 1984 included $27 million for rebuilding more steam-heated cars into HEP Heritage Fleet cars, and $3 million for building prototypes of the planned new single-level cars (see also last issue), according to NARP.....

MORE APRIL 24 CHANGES: The SOUTHWEST LIMITED will be speeded up 20 minutes in each direction, thanks to an agreement with the Santa Fe. Both EAGLES will be speeded up by 15 minutes, under a MoPac agreement. The UP will trim 25mins from the schedule of the eastbound PIONEER and 45mins from the westbound train. The Chicago departure time of the CAPITOL and BROADWAY will be 4:50pm, with a Washington arrival time of 11:45am.....

DOME CAR REBUILDING was discussed on page 3. From further information, we conclude that no firm plan of usage for the cars has been settled upon at Amtrak, but many possibilities are being discussed at headquarters. An Amtrak source thought that the CALIFORNIA ZEPHYR (former SF ZEPHYR) would be unlikely to be converted to a domeliner because of the numerous cars it splits off to the PIONEER and the DESERT WIND. Some sources now believe that the SUNSET LIMITED is a good candidate for dome cars, and that Superliners might be run on the Auto-Ferry. One rumor has it that nine more dome cars will be sent in the near future for conversion to head-end power.....

FEATHER RIVER CANYON was recently suggested to Amtrak President Graham Claytor as a route to use for the SAN FRANCISCO ZEPHYR. Claytor replied that "Amtrak has never made a technical evaluation of this potential re-route primarily because such a re-route would eliminate Reno which is a significant intermediate market, and would operate over a more circuitous route which we believe would require lengthening of schedules by over one hour, which is unacceptable. I agree that the Feather River Canyon is beautiful, but must mention that many of our passengers and employees find the Donner Pass crossing of the Sierra Nevada Range to be the most spectacular scenery on the Amtrak system".....

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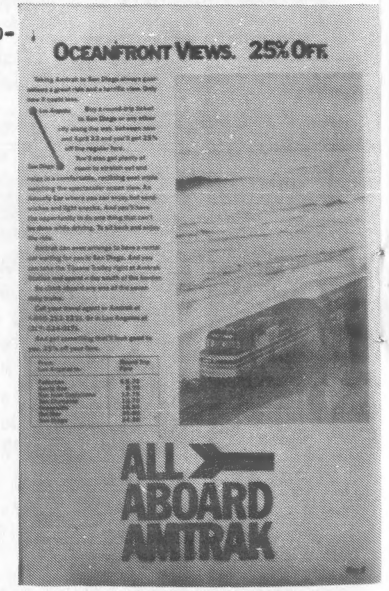
ALL-ABOARD AMTRAK ad shown below is one done especially for the SAN DIEGANS to promote the 25% off fare deal that is effective thru Apr 23. The ad headline reads "Oceanfront Vies. 25% off." Rail supporter George Falcon of Southern California has been helping publicize the trains by running these ads free of charge in his weekly Key Magazine.....



A READER REPORTS riding from Denver to Chicago in Superliner sleeper 32001, the L.A. car, which had been slightly modified as follows: there was an upstairs washroom in the vacant space at the head of the stairs (this washroom is more spacious than the downstairs ones and has a window; in many ways it is more like a railroad washroom than an airline one); hotplates had been installed to the right of the upstairs water fountain, over a built-in trash container, and one washroom had been removed downstairs and turned into a dressing room with adjoining washroom. Neither the porter nor train crews had seen such a modified car before.....

LAS VEGAS OFFICIALS on Mar 25 made preliminary moves to apply to California officials for tax-exempt bond financing for the proposed L.A. to Las Vegas Bullet Train line. The move is seen as competition for the L.A.-San Diego Bullet Train backers, because both must compete for the same state funding.....

OF AMFLEET II CARS Amtrak has, as of Mar 18, received all but 15. The total order is to be 150 cars.....

NEW YORK STATE Dept. of Transportation in December issued a booklet entitled "You CAN get there from here!" and subtitled "A Rail Travellers' Guide to Local Transportation in the Empire Corridor." It lists cities and towns on the route in alphabetical order, devoting at least a page or two to each, with a map orienting you to the city from the train station. Transit phone numbers and other information are given about each source of public transportation. For information about the booklet, contact the NY DOT at 1220 Washington Ave, Albany NY 12232.....

KANSAS CITY UNION STATION owner told Amtrak in December that it would be evicted when its lease expires Jun 30. Amtrak is engaged in talks with the owner to try to stay in the building. High operational costs have led the owners to attempt to shut the building down, while a new development is to go up alongside it.....

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"HOW MUCH CAN I GET FOR $125" Department: The Amtrak All-Aboard America Fare inspires riders to take the longest trip possible under the minimum fare rules. A man was found riding from Hollywood FL to Washington last month. He was going on to Chicago, then to New Orleans, then to Washington, and finally returning to Florida. That's 5131 miles for $125! The regular coach fare would be $553.....

RIO GRANDE ZEPHYR is running on weekends with refurbished car "Silver Shop" in the consist, in addition to "Silver Sky", giving the train a total of 6 dome cars. "Silver Shop", a dome buffet lounge, is ordinarily used as a backup car to the diner and the round-end observation lounge. No service is provided in the car at this time, tho.....

SPIRIT OF CALIFORNIA was the subject of 6500 petitions presented to the Governor at Sacramento Mar 25 in an effort to retain the train beyond next Sep 30. Caltrans has stopped all advertising for the train, and semi-privately prepared Welcome Aboard cards placed in the train were ordered removed by Caltrans. Gov. Deukmejian declared recently that there is "no way" the train canbe saved.....

"CLOSING OUT THE Zephyr love affair" is the title of a cover story in USA Today (Mar 24) detailing how the RIO GRANDE ZEPHYR will be taken over by Amtrak..

A PITTSBURGH POST Gazette cartoon on Mar 21 pictured a mammoth truck hitting an Amtrak train and setting the train flying. Someone in the truck asks, "Did we just run over a car?" The truck driver answers, "Car?? Heck, boy, that was the BROADWAY LIMITED!" The cartoon relates to the recent law permitting twin-trailer trucks to run on Pennsylvania's Turnpike and Interstates.....

STATE OF WYOMING is considering taking legal action to try to block the Amtrak decision to route the SF ZEPHYR away from the state.....

FORTHCOMING AUTO FERRY should have at least one more boarding location for travelers' convenience, perhaps Rocky Mount NC or Florence SC southbound and perhaps Jacksonville FL northbound, suggests reader David McLemore.....

AMTRAK OFFICIALLY ANNOUNCED the new route and schedule for the CALIFORNIA ZEPHYR on Mar 16 (altho the change of train name came the next day).....

News in this issue is updated thru Mar 31, 1983.

CARS & CONSISTS

*N&W Coal Centennial Special, Roanoke-Norfolk VA Mar 16: steam engine 611, 2 tenders; cars 100 (office car), 1407, 1069 "Missionary Ridge", ISRX 9401, 501, 533, 536, RNRH 1220 "Carol W. Jensen", 531, 539, 540, RNRH 3305 "Mardi Gras". N&W coal hopper 143960 in bunting was pulled Bluefield-Roanoke pulled by two N&W diesels with SR-like paint design.

*SAN DIEGAN, train 577, Santa Ana Mar 13: engine 224; cars 21240, 21183, 20036 Amcafe, 21174, 21251.

*SAN FRANCISCO ZEPHYR, train 6, Ogden Mar 5: engines 369, 294; cars 1143, 1222, 39906, 32045, 38026, 33018, 34048.

*PIONEER, train 26, Ogden Mar 5: engine 218; cars 38007, 31036, 34100, 34042.
*DESERT WIND, train 36, Ogden Mar 5: engines 238, 247; cars 1203, 20231, 39911, 34090, 32025.
*SILVER METEOR, train 98, St. Petersburg-Jacksonville Feb 26: engine 384; cars 1145, 25049, 3120, 25014, 25035, 25071, 25002, 2453 "Cedar Grove."
*SILVER PALM, train 896, Hollywood FL Feb 21: engine 390; cars 25075, 25038, 25054, 28016.
*SILVER STAR, train 92, Hollywood FL Feb 24: engine 377; cars 1169, 1618, 2476 "Sarasota", 2923 "Pacific Park", 2094, 25016, 25007, 28010, 8510.

QUOTES OF THE WEEK***

"This will without a doubt be the finest rail travel experience in the whole country."

--Amtrak President Graham Claytor at Amtrak Board meeting Mar 16 announcing switch to Rio Grande route.

SLIP OF THE MONTH CLUB***

"High winds about 1:30 p.m. Friday apparently lifted the roof from the gazebo at the Amtrak whistlestop and straddled it atop the downtown parking lot fence.

Although the structure, designed to give cover to prospective train passengers, will take a while to repair, Amtrak train service hee will not be interrupted."

--Pamela McCoy in Picayune (MS) Item, Mar 6.

(Train service is no laughing matter.)

RAIL FANTRIPS

Apr 23: Boston to Bennington NH - B&M Hillsboro Branch. Info from: Massachusetts Bay Railroad Enthusiasts, Box 208, E. Walpole MA 02032. Phone (617) 581-0411.

Apr 24: Railroad Extravaganza, 1050 Jeanette Ave, Union NJ , 10am-4pm. Over 100 tables of RR memorabilia. $2, kids & seniors $1. Held rain or shine. Tri-State Rwy Historical Society, Box 2243, Clifton NJ 07015. (201) 857-2987.

Apr 30: Royal Blue 83--25th anniv of end of B&O psgr serv between Baltimore & NY. Baltimore-Phila; lv Balt. 9am, 4hr layover in Phila. $25, first class $40. Baltimore Chapter NRHS, Box 10233, Baltimore MD 21234.

Apr 30: Springtime in the Mother Lode. SPIRIT OF CALIF from San Jose & Bay Area to Sacramento, bus to Jackson, Sutter Creek, etc. Lunch incl. Sac RR Museum. Train back. $48 SF, $57 San Jose. NRHS Central Coast, 273 Omira Dr, San Jose CA 95123.

May 11: 20th anniv of resumption of riverboat travel betw San Francisco Bay and Sacramento. Various travel plans available. Info from: Delta Travel, Box 813, 1540 W. Capitol, West Sacramento CA 95691. Phone (916) 372-3690.

May 27-30: "Chicago Past, Present & Future." Central Electric Railfans' Ass'n is 45 yrs old. Daily events: North Shore Line, South Shore,, Anniv banquet, Museums, CTA rapid transit system. Combination ticket for all events, $85. CERA, Box 503, Chicago IL 60690.

May 29 & 30: West Shore Express, Hoboken NJ-Selkirk NY RT, CR River Line. 2 1-day roundtrips. Photo runbys, snacks, etc. $39 per trip. By advance sale only. Capacity limited. Tri-State Rwy Hist Soc, Box 2243, Clifton NJ 07015. 201-857-2987.

Jun 18-15: Holland America's "Nieuw Amsterdam" maiden voyage, L.A.-S.F.-Victoria-Prince Rupert-Alert Bay-Vancouver. Staterooms $599 & $699. Info: Chris Kyte, Great Western Tours, Sheraton Palace Hotel, San Francisco CA 94105, 415-398-2994.

One Rail Fantrips listing is free. Send full info to: RAIL TRAVEL NEWS, Fantrips Dept, PO Box 9007, Berkeley CA 94709. When responding to listing, include SASE.

EXPRESS ADS

VIA RAIL CANADA, AMTRAK, EURAIL PASS, 20th CENTURY RAIL TOURS - Tickets and reservations - WE KNOW HOW! One call does it all. Pay by credit card or check. Tickets mailed directly to you. Contact GREAT WESTERN TOURS, masters of rail travel, Sheraton Palace Hotel, Suite 900, San Francisco 94105. (415) 398-2994.

DINING CAR CHINA, glasses, silver, cloth. Timetables, guides, stationery, rules, metal & Pullman items, annual reports. Many railroads. Long 37¢ stamped envelope brings list. J. McClellan, 1752 S. Wichita, Wichita, KS 67213. Will buy items.

SEE OUR RAILROADIANA items, china, glasses, silver, linens, timetables, rules, etc. at "Cornfield Meet" Apr 10, Pasadena CA Hilton and "Lone Star" RRiana Show Will Rogers Memorial Center, Ft. Worth TX May 1. Jim & Elaine McClellan.

TRAIN AND BUS TRANSPORT 2000 PIN, available for $2.00 from Transport 2000 Quebec, 2275 Laurier East, Montreal, Quebec, H2H ZN8, Canada.

SIXTH GREAT PACIFIC COAST RAILROADIANA COLLECTOR'S SHOW and SALE, Saturday May 7, 1983. Capitol Plaza Holiday Inn, 300 J St, Sacramento CA (near State RR Museum). Hours 10am to 4pm. Sponsored by the National Association of Timetable Collectors. Seller tables available: members $20, non-members $30. Public admission $1.50. Contact Roy Gabriel, P.O. Box 981, Sacramento CA 95805.

July 30-31, August 6-7, 1983, "Steam Chicago Style" The 20th Century RR Club and Norfolk Southern Corp. are proud to announce the operation of four steam-powered excursions from Chicago to be operated with N&W's J class locomotive 611. The "Nickel Plate Limited" will operate to Ft Wayne, IN and return on July 30 and August 7. The "Wabash Cannonball" will operate to Decatur, IL and return on July 31, and August 6. All trips depart and arrive Chicago Union Station. Consist to include recording car, open window and air conditioned coaches, souvenir snack car and first class section featuring domes, diner and observation car. For complete details send a long SASE to "Steam Chicago Style", Dept R, Box 16-611, Summit IL 60501.

May 14-15, 1983 - Toledo to Bellevue, Ohio - Round trips, using NKP 765 and 17 cars. First excursion train over this part of the old Wheeling & Lake Erie mainline in 34 years. Open & closed coaches - $23 adult, $15 children - First class Pullman space $35. Write Mad River & NKP RR Society, PO Box 42, Bellevue OH 44811.

Aug. 12 thru 27, 1983 - Western Canada Rail Tour - Departs Bellevue & Toledo OH. 7,000-mile train tour of Western Canada. Covers CANADIAN, SKEENA, CARIBOU DAYLINER routes and steam trips on Prairie Dog Central & Royal Hudson using Day-niter seating. $872 per person. Write Mad River & NKP RR Society, PO Box 42, Bellevue OH 44811.

Sep 17-25, 1983 - Third Annual Western Rail Tour. Departs Sandusky OH. Amtrak to Colorado. Visits all Narrow Gauge operations & rides Rio Grande's ZEPHYR. Side trip to Las Vegas. Visits Golden RR Museum & Georgetown. $769 per person. Write: Mad River & NKP RR Society, PO Box 42, Bellevue OH 44811.

ORIENT EXPRESS--Join our group on the 100th anniversary of the most famous sentimental journey from London to Istanbul. Tour includes stops in Salzburg, Vienna, Budapest, Bucharest, Sofia and more. Departs London October 1-17, 1983. For further information call or write WORLD CLASS TRAVEL INC., 1216 Sycamore St., Cincinnati OH 45210. (513) 421-8000.

"ISSUES IN AMERICAN RAIL TRAVEL", RTN's little book on important problems with America's rail passenger revival, is almost ready for publication. Price will be $4.50, which includes relevant tax & postage. Full details willbe given later in RTN. Rail Travel News, PO Box 9007, Berkeley CA 94709.

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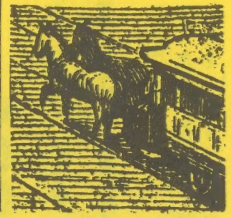

Be sure to send RTN your change of address as early as possible. Don't rely on the Postal Service to forward your mail!

LETTERS

(continued from page 2)

Thanks for your article "The Sunset Route is 100 Years Old" in RTN 262. As you noted, the Silver Spike Centennial is being commemorated along the Sunset Route in a number of ways. To mark the anniversary, an "Old Railroaders' Reunion" will open Pioneer Heritage Week in Del Rio on April 24.

The old engraving which illustrates your story is of the original crossing of the Pecos River instead of the Devil's River. The railroad running alongside the Rio Grande west of Del Rio turned up the east bank of Devil's River where the two rivers joined and progressed some distance before climbing out of the canyon to bridge the river. Construction of Lake Amistad required relocation of the line and a new bridge opened 1963. The line descended into the Pecos River canyon to cross the river on the bridge you have pictured by means of tunnels at each end. It was replaced in only nine years by the famous Pecos High Bridge, and this section of the line was abandoned.

I have in my possession several items to support the 5,074 feet elevation the Amtrak release used for the highest point on the Sunset Route. A 1923 History of the El Paso Division places the elevation of the summit at 5,074.1. This same source gives the elevation of Salton, the low point, at 202 feet below sea level. "Southern Pacific", by Neill C. Wilson and Frank J. Taylor, c. 1952, also uses 202 as a current elevation. A Southern Pacific Passenger Time Table dated April 24, 1960 which I have has the elevation at Salton listed at 191 below sea level.

The Wilson Taylor book, page 144, states:

"Today the road is on comparatively 'high' ground, although between Niland and Indio, 63 miles of it is below sea level, and at Salton station it is 202 feet below sea level.

"But by April of 1907, when the surface of Salton Sea was at minus 198 feet, it stood 74 feet higher than the site of the abandoned line..." 272?

Many interesting facts emerge as people pore over the history of the Sunset Route for this anniversary.

For instance, historians have generally used Feb 5, 1883 as the date the first thru trains left San Francisco and New Orleans. However, the Gulf Coast Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society in Houston has now found contemporary newspaper accounts in Houston and San Antonio indicating that thru trains ran over the new tracks in West Texas as early as Feb 1, 1883.

Dan Bus, publisher
Del Rio Guide
Del Rio, Texas

(The Del Rio Guide is publishing an article in each of 1983's 12 issues about the history of the Sunset Route. Mail subscriptions are $12 per year in U.S. to 708-A Bedell Avenue, Del Rio TX 78840. --Ed.)

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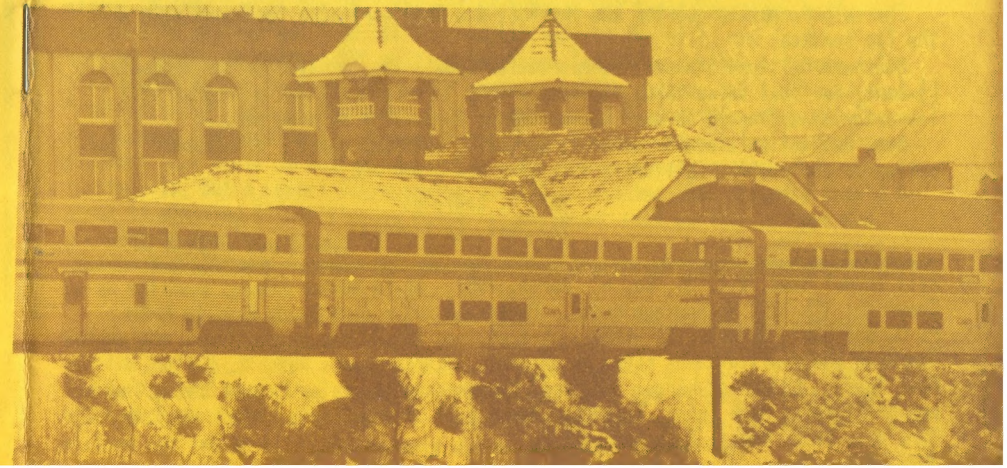

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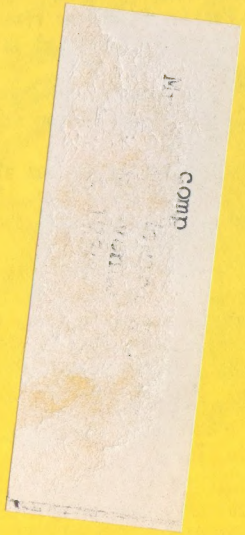

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